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SUBJECT: TAMIL NADU CHIEF MINISTER'S TRIBUTE TO DEAD TAMIL TIGER
CAUSES MEDIA STORM

¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi's poem eulogizing a leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam killed in an attack by the Sri Lankan air force raised questions about his views on the banned group. Media reports and protests by opposition parties caused a political storm, but observers believe Karunanidhi was simply paying lip service to the Sri Lankan Tamils and nothing more. A senior official in Tamil Nadu's police intelligence unit told post that any sympathy on the part of the Chief Minister has not had an impact on the coordinated state and national security effort to keep the Tamil Tigers out of Tamil Nadu. END SUMMARY

CHIEF MINISTER'S POETIC HOMAGE TO TAMIL TIGER

¶12. (SBU) Karunanidhi's November 3 eulogy of Thamilchelvan, who was reportedly killed in a November 2 Sri Lankan air raid, looked as if it had been penned by an ardent fan: "A face that was ever-smiling...a youthful man with a heart as strong as the Himalayas, a commander...who deemed his life but a bit of manure for the liberation struggle, one who was like life to us, like a brother; who has etched his fame on every Tamil heart and every Tamil home, where are you gone?" (NOTE: It is not unusual for Karunanidhi, who started his career as a screen writer and has penned several volumes of poetry, to use a poem to communicate a political message. END NOTE.) To add fuel to the fire, the poem was distributed to the media through official government channels.

OPPOSITION CRIES FOUL, DEMANDS DISMISSAL

¶13. (SBU) Opposition AIADMK leader Jayalalithaa, a staunch critic of the Tamil Tigers, said Karunanidhi's act was unconstitutional and asked the Center to dismiss the DMK government. In a statement issued to the media she alleged that Karunanidhi had "secret ties" with the banned terrorist organization. She stated that she would move the Supreme Court against the DMK government "as the Union Government has not taken a serious note of the issue."

¶14. (SBU) The DMK's Congress allies were especially upset by the Chief Minister's apparent display of sympathy for the Tamil Tigers given the group's responsibility for the 1991 assassination of Congress party icon Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The gravity of the matter was illustrated by the fact that the leaders of the warring factions in the Tamil Nadu Congress -- Union Ministers of State G.K. Vasan and E.V.K.S. Elangovan -- joined together to publicly criticize the Chief Minister. A Congress member of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly told us that the reaction also reflects frustration in the Tamil Nadu Congress that the ruling DMK party has not given them a share in power at the state, even while Congress shares power with the DMK in New Delhi.

DON'T MIND THE WORDS; SEE WHAT WE DO, SAY POLICE

¶ 15. (SBU) A senior official in Tamil Nadu's police intelligence bureau said that despite the Chief Minister's public statements expressing sympathy for the slain Tamil Tiger leader, the state police receive clear policy directives from the state government to clamp down on any activities of the banned terrorist organization in Tamil Nadu. "Ignore the public statements; they mean nothing," the official said. He believes that so long as the Indian Navy and the Coast Guard keep vigil across the Pak Strait, the Tamil Tigers will not be able to develop supply lines through Tamil Nadu. He added that state and national security agencies are coordinating well. The official told us that a few Tamil Tiger cells remain in Tamil Nadu but that their activities are largely limited to liaison between the pro-Tamil Tiger political parties and groups in order to carry out propaganda and whip up political support.

PRO-TAMIL TIGER LEADERS ARRESTED

¶ 16. (SBU) Confirming the impression conveyed by the intelligence officer, Tamil Nadu police arrested Vaiko, the leader of the pro-Tamil Tiger MDMK party, and 268 of his supporters on November 12 for attempting to stage a procession to pay homage to Thamilchelvan.

Local newspapers reported that the marchers shouted slogans supporting the Tamil Tigers and quoted Vaiko as sarcastically commenting: "You wrote a poem in praise of Thamilchelvan but before the ink could dry you have turned against the Tamils. We think you wrote the poem only to cheat the Tamils."

¶ 17. (SBU) COMMENT: Chief Minister Karunanidhi, who has been dismissed from power by the central government twice before, is unlikely go against Government of India policy on an issue as sensitive as Sri Lanka. But the octogenarian stalwart on the Tamil political scene has made no secret of his desire for a legacy as the "father of world Tamils," which explains the flowery language he used to eulogize Thamilchelvan. Moreover, a small section of the DMK core constituency is sympathetic to the Tamil Tigers and their struggle for a separate homeland. Ever the political operator, Karunanidhi will continue to engage in verbal flattery to satisfy them. It will remain simple lip service, however, and we expect the state government to continue to act aggressively against the Tamil Tigers.

END COMMENT.

HOPPER